

NFIRS News

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written by Lori Loyd

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Thanks

As our small NFIRS training team of two has traveled across the State to present NFIRS 5 training, we have discovered a large group of fire department members who realize the value of reporting fires, but that's not what motivates you to report. You have demonstrated a strong desire to help determine the fire problem in our communities so that these occurrences can be prevented or eliminated. Thanks to you, agencies such as the Consumer Products Safety Commission are able to take the information you report to manufacturers who are then able to correct product defects that are causing fires, hurting people and property. Thanks to you, the Federal government is realizing a need to provide funding to fire departments across the nation to help you perform your jobs more safely and efficiently. It is due to your efforts that our nation is a safer place to live. We thank you for inviting us into your departments to train, and for the positive attitudes you have expressed and positive actions you have taken. You are what makes this country such a great place to live. We commend you!

Cathy Wann
NFIRS Program Manager

Finally . . .

I have all the reports received for 2002 entered. Enclosed are reports and, if you are not a paid chief (receive \$50 or more annually in compensation from your department), a payment form for the fire reports submitted in 2002. Due to accounting changes made by the state, please return the forms by the indicated due date and make sure you enter your social security number.

Payment cannot be made without your social security number. The accounting changes could possibly cause a delay in receiving your payment.

If you have not sent in all or any 2002 reports you may still do so. I must have them no later than April 30, 2003.

It would help a great deal in getting reports out to you in a more timely manner if departments submitted reports at least quarterly, or monthly if you have a lot of calls. This will save me being buried at the end of the year.

I also spent a lot of time reentering reports that departments printed off from their software instead of exporting the data to a flat file on your hard drive and then copying it to a floppy disk or sending it as an email attachment. It serves no purpose for me to reenter data once it has already been entered by someone on your department. It is also cheaper to send a floppy disk than a large manila envelope full of paper. Therefore, all 2003 data from departments with software MUST be submitted electronically (floppy disk or email attachment). If I receive paper other than the standard NFIRS 5.0 reports they will be returned to the fire department for resubmittal electronically.

NFIRS 5.0 Software

The contract with Aether has expired and we will not obtain a new contract with a vendor. Any software purchased from Aether or another vendor from now on will probably be at full price.

The Fire Marshal's Office is not endorsing one vendor's software over another. It is each department's choice as to what software, if any, you purchase although it must be compatible with

the federal reporting system. We are still accepting paper in 5.0, however, departments may find using software easier.

If you are interested in software, the approved vendor list can be found at www.nfirs.fema.gov/activevendors.htm or contact me and I will send you a list. Don't forget to ask about the hardware requirements (what kind of computer you need) when you are talking with a vendor about their software. Some departments have purchased software that is not compatible with their computer. If you purchase a new computer with Windows XP Home version, some vendor software will not work. It will work with Windows XP Professional version.

It is important to also purchase Tech Support or a Maintenance Contract with your software. This will ensure that you receive software upgrades and are able to contact the vendor with any problems with the software. Upgrades to the software are important so you stay current with reporting requirements and receive any fixes to "bugs" in the software.

If you need help installing the software or if you are having problems with the software (exporting data, etc), you need to contact the vendor for assistance. The State Fire Marshal's Office is not responsible for vendor support. However, if you have questions on completing a report, e.g., what code or module to use or how to send your data feel free to contact Cathy or me.

We are currently pilot testing the Federal Data Entry Tool with some departments. Since support for this software falls to this office, we are limiting the number of departments at this time. We will probably open the software up to anyone interested once we get a feel for how much time is needed to support the software. If your department has a computer, an Internet connection (required to use the software), and someone on your department who understands computers and how to download and install software, contact Cathy or me to find out more about this software.

NFIRS 5.0 Reminders

◆ If using software, please be sure your FDID

number and timeframe are included in the filename (example: 99001June02.txt). I save these files and occasionally need to refer back to them. Having this information in the filename helps to locate the right file.

◆ In NFIRS 4.1 it was possible to complete what was called a short form on trash and grass fires. This is not the case in NFIRS 5.0. Any incident coded as Incident Type 140-173 requires the Fire or Wildland Module to also be completed.

◆ Please try to use Incident Type 100 sparingly. The use of this code means you are unable to classify a fire as a structure, vehicle, grass, trash, outside fire, or crop fire. With few exceptions, it should be possible to find a more definitive code to use. If you are not sure what the appropriate code is, please contact Cathy or myself for assistance in coding the report.

◆ If the Incident Type on the Basic Module is coded 130-139 then the mobile property information must be completed on the Fire Module.

◆ When entering the number of personnel in Block G1 on the Basic Module, count the Chief as Other if they were present as incident commander. If they assisted with EMS or suppression then count them in that field.

◆ Do not enter "Total" in the Estimated Dollar Loss field (G2 on the Basic Module). I cannot enter "Total" into the computer. Someone not at the scene would have no idea what the value of the property was so "Total" is meaningless.

Enter your best estimate of the dollar loss caused by the fire. You cannot be held liable for this information. Break the amount between property and contents whenever applicable. It is also better to leave the field blank if the dollar loss is unknown than to enter zero.

It is to your benefit to report dollar loss whenever possible as it could affect your ISO or insurance rating.

◆ This is the last year to report using NFIRS 4.1. Effective January 1, 2004 ONLY NFIRS 5.0 reports will be accepted. I have a very small supply of the NFIRS 4.1 incident report but plenty of the civilian and firefighter casualty forms if you need them.